IRAQ GOVERNANCE STRENGTHENING PROJECT (GSP/ TAQADUM)

Annual Report on Lessons Learned and Best Practices (2014)

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Contents

Acronyms

COMSEC	Council of Ministers Secretariat
COP	Chief of Party
COTR	Contracting Officer's Technical Representative
CSD	Citizen Service Desks
CSS	Citizen Satisfaction Survey
DCOP	Deputy Chief of Party
ESDO	Essential Service Delivery Oversight
GO	Office of the Governor
GoI	Government of Iraq
GSP/Taqadum	Governance Strengthening Project
HCCP	Higher Coordinating Commission for Provinces
ILA	Implementation Letter Agreement
IR	Intermediate Result
M&E	Monitoring & Evaluation
MoSGA	Ministry of State for Governorate Affairs
OSTP	Organizational Self-assessment and Transformation Program
PC	Provincial Council
PMAC	Prime Minister's Advisory Council
PMP	Performance Management Plan
PPDC	Provincial Planning and Development Council
RM	Regional Manager
SLIT	Sub-legislation implementation Tracking
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USG	United States Government

I. Introduction

As per Section F.7.A.(d), Chemonics provides its **Annual Report on Lessons Learned and Best Practices** for the Governance Strengthening Project (GSP), (*hereinafter referred to as GSP/ Taqadum*), under Contract No. AID-267-C-11-00006. This report covers lessons learned and best practices gleaned from Year 3 that began on October 1, 2013 and ended on June 30, 2014 and is focuses on two specific areas: (a) in the overall technical management of the project; and (b) in the implementation of technical programming activities.
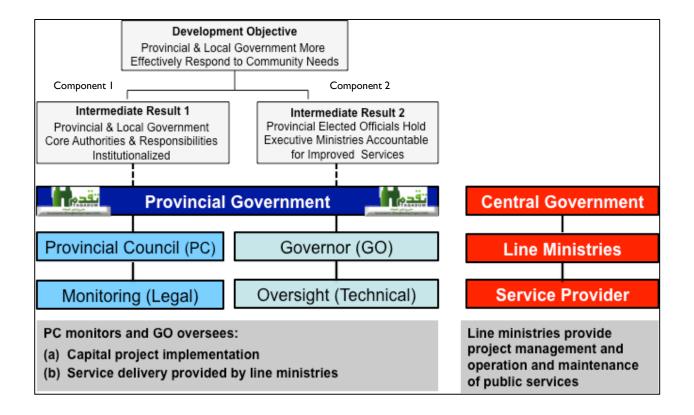
II. Background

In September 2011, USAID launched the GSP/Taqadum project, designed to enable provincial and local governments to respond more effectively to community needs. The project had two components:

- ▪ **Component I – Institutional Strengthening**, *defined by GSP/Taqadum's Results Framework Intermediate Result (IR) 1 as institutionalizing provincial and local governments core authorities and responsibilities; and*

- ▪ **Component II – Executive Oversight**, *defined by GSP/Taqadum's Results Framework Intermediate Result (IR) 2 as holding executive ministries accountable for improved services, by provincial elected officials.*

Under each component, GSP/Taqadum's interventions promoted local government institutional development to improve monitoring, legislative, budgeting, and planning functions consistent with Provincial Powers Act of 2008 (also known as Law 21). GSP/Taqadum's 10-program elements were distributed evenly between each of the two components.

The block on the left in the diagram below visually depicts the project's structure showing the relationship between the project's development objective, IRs, components, and counterparts from the inception of the project until June 30, 2014.

During the extension period beginning on July 1 2014, the project's structure will be downsized to incorporate technical programming activities related solely to the passage (in August 2013) of the Second Amendment to Law 21. In this Amendment, Article 45 transfers service delivery authority from ministerial to governorate administration and is the basis of the extension period work plan. The provision of services in eight ministries will gradually transition from central government responsibility (as shown on the right side of the diagram) to governorate ownership and delivery.

III. Definitions

Within the context and comprehension of this report,

Best Practices refers to a systematic procedure that yields results superior to those achieved with other means; and

Lessons Learned is knowledge gained through experience, which when shared, benefits the work

of others. The lessons learned can be either a good experience to follow or a bad experience to avoid.

IV. Approach

There is one fundamental assumption that underpins the lessons learned and best practices applied to overall management of the project and the implementation of technical programming activities. The assumption is that, to the extent that it serves to justify the course of action in consecutive annual work plans, lessons learned and best practices may roll over from one program year to the next and accordingly, some of the narrative presented in prior reports may be repeated in this particular report.

Separately, in comparing consecutive work plans, it must be noted that a significant shift in program emphasis occurred between the work plans for Year 3 and the extension period. The former encompassed 10 program elements distributed across 16 provinces and the latter is specific to program activities to develop action plans to decentralize three ministries in five provinces over a period of six months. While significant lessons learned and best practices from the previous Program Year are incorporated into the extension period work plan, new practices and approaches are also introduced that are responsive to the planned outcomes.

V. Lessons Learned and Best Practices

In this section, the descriptions are specific to the goal of this document, which is to provide a justification for the actions articulated in the extension period work plan based on lessons learned and best practices that are applied to:

- *GSP/Taqadum's overall technical management of the project; and*
- *GSP/Taqadum's implementation of technical programming activities.*

A. Overall Technical Management of the Project

Essentially, the overall technical management of the project during the extension period is predicated on the scope of work and associated budget; it impacts (1) organizational structure; (2) selection of targeted provinces; and (3) staffing. Each of these three topics is described in further detail.

1. Organizational Structure

During Program Year 2, GSP/Taqadum was able to complete the recruitment of all key and technical personnel, organize its technical activities around work plan outcomes and

counterpart engagement principles, and strengthen its activity management techniques. This systemized approach was fine-tuned to good effect in Program Year 3.

Fundamentally, GSP/Taqadum employs a matrix organizational structure and remote management system through embedded governorate offices and regional hubs that emphasizes communication and interaction between frontline technical programming specialists in the field and backend technical advisors in the hubs and headquarters. Here normal chain of command considerations are subordinate to delivering technical interventions but are required when dealing with administrative issues. Successfully managing outcomes using this approach requires the involvement of GSP/Taqadum's key personnel and technical leaders.

The organizational structure during the extension period will be a scaled-down and modified version of the structure used in Program Year 3; it will be adapted to the current contractual level of effort. One significant difference from the prior period is the absence of Component Leader(s), Regional Director, and Deputy Chief of Party (DCOP) positions. As a consequence of, the GSP/ Taqadum Chief of Party (COP) will assume greater supervisory responsibility in the area of technical programming. When all positions are filled, between five to eight technical staff and the two Regional Managers (RM) will report to the COP.

Despite the absence of the positions noted above, the increased span of direct technical responsibility for the COP is partially offset by the reduced technical scope and geographic footprint of the extension period activities.

Lesson Learned: A high-level and committed focus in the technical area served GSP/Taqadum well in the most recent Program Year, as evidenced by the project's achievements. GSP/Taqadum will continue maintaining such a posture and expand use of its systemized activity management techniques during the extension period.

2. Selection of Targeted Provinces

The extension period work plan targets five provinces - four south central region provinces that include Babil, Diwaniyah, Najaf, and Wasit; and the central region province of Baghdad – to undertake technical programming activities. The selection of these provinces is an important lesson learned and is described in the next paragraph.

Lesson Learned: The provinces in the south central region have historically been advanced in their acceptance and use of USAID's local governance program interventions. Essentially, this progressive region is a center for the diffusion of cutting edge good governance knowledge and practices that is propagated by their similar ethnography and relative geographic proximity to each other as well as to Baghdad. The province of Baghdad is similarly a center for the diffusion

of good governance knowledge due to the presence of GSP/Taqadum's technical competencies residing in the Iraqi capital.

The convergence of all of this technical know-how and practices makes these five provinces ideal targets to deliver programming during the extension period. Their selection is also abetted by evidence of documented achievements and impact, elevated depths of cost sharing, deep relationships with provincial officials, and high levels of counterpart commitment to GSP/Taqadum's interventions.

3. Staffing

The nature of the work plan deliverables as well as the six-month horizon to complete activities requires a shift in how staff approach the challenge of delivering technical programming. GSP/Taqadum staff are well schooled in the longer-term, consultative approach to performing normal development type work. However, the time constraints of the extension period will require an approach that considers prescriptive solutions within a less deliberative continuum.

Additionally, a significant part of the extension period work plan requires undertaking comprehensive data collection, assessment, analysis, and recommendations for decentralization of tasks, services, and competencies as they relate to ministerial directorates - both its horizontal functional responsibilities; and vertical authorities and linkages. This type of activity requires more analytical skills in addition to the customary advisory and facilitation skill sets that defined a large portion of activities the project undertook in Program Year 2 & 3.

Lesson Learned: GSP/Taqadum understands the staffing requirements during the extension period and is putting in place a strategy to accommodate the program's needs, moving forward. First, the project's management team has gone through a methodical process of identifying staff that need to be retained and staff that need to be replaced. Second, the project has held orientation sessions for staff to emphasize work requirements and expectations. Third, the project is developing a common toolkit to assist staff with the collection and analysis of data. Fourth, during the work plan transition period (May-June), the project undertook an information discovery phase to better understand the current configuration of targeted ministries and this information is being circulated to educate GSP/Taqadum's staff. The project has prioritized information and knowledge exchange as a means to help staff embrace impending capacity building challenges.

B. Implementation of Technical Programming Activities

The implementation of technical programming activities during the extension period work plan closely follows actions from prior program periods and include lessons learned and best

practices in the following areas: (1) capacity building platform; (2) GoI relationships; (3) interconnectivity and knowledge sharing networks; (4) activity cost sharing arrangements; and (5) monitoring and evaluation.

1. Capacity Building Platforms

One of the key aspects of GSP/Taqadum's interventions in Program Year 2 and 3 that contributed to the project's success was augmenting structures in counterpart organizations to delivery technical programming. There are several examples of augmented structures including the establishment of Organizational Self-assessment and Transformation Program (OSTP) teams inside the GO and PC; the formation of Provincial Planning and Development Councils (PPDCs); the creation of Essential Service Delivery Oversight (ESDO) work groups in eight provinces; and the establishment of PC and/or GO Sub-legislation Implementation Tracking (SLIT) workgroups in 12 provinces.

These expanded structures, composed of provincial staff, served as an accessible and focused platform for GSP/Taqadum to deliver its technical interventions. Members of the workgroups or units largely remained the same and as a result, GSP/Taqadum was able to provide capacity building depth to build expertise for its members. In several instances, these workgroups transitioned to fully funded, institutionalized units of the GO or PC by the time GSP/Taqadum reduced major programming activities on March 31, 2014.

Best Practice: During the extension period, GSP/Taqadum will form Task Forces composed of representatives from the Directorates, GO, and PC to conduct much of its technical programming activities. GSP/Taqadum will provide assistance to formalize the organization, membership, and work of the Task Forces. This step is consistent with actions that worked successfully for the program in prior program periods.

Additionally, GSP/Taqadum will work through established ESDOs in Wasit, Babil, Diwaniyah, and Najaf to develop service delivery improvement plans; this is an extension period deliverable. The project will be able to leverage its existing relationships and know-how to perform this task without having to invest time and effort in recreating the ESDO set-up. However, for Baghdad province, the cycle to develop the service delivery improvement plan will take longer since the province must first establish an ESDO.

Lesson Learned: One lesson learned from GSP/Taqadum's work with Provincial Planning and Development Councils (PPDC) in Program Years 2 & 3 is the need to keep the membership of the provincial Task Force manageable. In the case of the PPDC, the number of members in each of the PPDCs was substantial and as a consequence, meetings and technical assistance sessions proved to be challenging and not always productive.

2. GoI Relationships

In Program Years 2 & 3, GSP/Taqadum continued to further deepen relationships with provincial and central government officials. GSP/Taqadum strategically positioned these relationships to strengthen cooperation and coordination between central and provincial officials to improve service delivery.

Some examples of improved cooperation and support, specific to GSP/Taqadum interventions in Program Year 3 include (a) support by Head of the Prime Minister's Advisory Council (PMAC) to reduce the legislative and administrative obstacles related to the investment budget, government contracts, and budget execution instructions; (b) support by Prime Minister's Office for the framework for decentralization as provided in Amended Law 21, Article 45; (c) support by Ministry of State for Governorate Affairs (MoSGA) for a variety of GSP/Taqadum interventions including OSTP and PPDC; and (d) continued support by Council of Minister's Secretariat (COMSEC) for Citizen Service Desks (CSDs).

Best Practice: Given the complications of a political agreement needed to advance decentralization, GSP/Taqadum will continue cultivating relationships among the highest levels of government to build support for the work that the project is doing during the extension period. Since a major deliverable of the extension period work plan is the development and submission of a decentralization action plan to the Higher Coordinating Commission for Provinces (HCCP) for approval, GSP/Taqadum's management will continue communicating the project's progress with high-ranking officials at the central and provincial level to ensure their involvement and buy-in ahead of an eventual decision to approve these plans.

Additionally, GSP/Taqadum will continue to conduct regular meetings with other USAID implementers to create opportunities for cooperation, particularly with regard to policy coordination between provincial governments and central government.

3. Interconnectivity and Knowledge Sharing Networks

The development, use, and sharing of information was a feature of GSP/Taqadum's activities during Program Year 3. The capacity building premise of GSP/Taqadum is rooted in the belief that (a) information from GSP/Taqadum's interventions enables the creation and empowerment of knowledgeable workers and knowledge infused systems; and (b) that the sharing of discrete or common information (for example, EDSO or CSD data) in local government creates higher levels of organizational views, understanding, and decision-making.

During Program Year 3, GSP/Taqadum brought together practitioners of common GSP/Taqadum interventions from the different provinces to share their experiences. With the

exception of the Citizen Satisfaction Survey (CSS) program element, in every one of the other program elements, practitioners from target provinces attended workshop and/or conferences to network, provide feedback, develop consensus, share knowledge, build capacity, and articulate their unique experiences around a common GSP/Taqadum intervention.

Through these interactions, knowledge sharing user groups emerged, specific to a topical area such as organizational improvements for OSTP members, customer service practices for CSD staff, or advance survey techniques for provincial ESDO teams.

Independently, GSP/Taqadum recognizes that decision-making is exponentially improved when individual information-infused interventions are leveraged to link detached sets of information; the program calls this condition, interconnectivity. In April 2014, GSP/Taqadum hosted a Best Practices Conference for key officials to introduce and assert the importance of interconnectivity of information in provincial government. There are two parts to provincial interconnectivity, firstly, understanding the direct and indirect organizational connections and secondly, using this understanding to make better decisions that positively impact the delivery of public services. The protocols of interconnectivity will be used during the extension period.

Best Practice: The extension period work plan requires a comprehensive understanding of internal organizational hierarchical arrangements in the central ministry directorates including its functions, span of authority, lines of communication, and resources. Additionally, the work plan demands understanding external linkages between the Ministry of Finance and the directorates to ascertain the flow of fiscal resources. Finally, the work plan entails activities related to assessing the current level of public services.

In order to meet the outcome of these tasks, which is to formulate a blueprint for gradual decentralization of tasks, services, and competencies, GSP/Taqadum will be using data interconnectivity strategies. Specifically, data integration, which is a technique for combining data from different sources to provide a unified view for Task Force members, will be employed as part of the data analysis and reporting work by GSP/Taqadum technical staff.

Best Practice: The extension period work plan delineates a process to harmonize the provincial inputs of the decentralization blueprint. To accomplish this, GSP/Taqadum will periodically bring specific provincial Task Force sub-committees together to share experiences from their respective provinces. GSP/Taqadum will utilize the program's know how in extracting value from knowledge sharing networks to build a collaborative, innovative, and competency-focused platform for practitioners who will identify issues, share approaches, and make results available to others. Ultimately, the harmonized inputs will reflect the strength of this collective.

4. Activity Cost Sharing Arrangements

GSP/Taqadum captures cost share information for three different elements of counterpart cost sharing. The most common is called Activity Cost Sharing and it is basically cost sharing related to workshops, conferences, and technical assistance; examples of this type of cost data includes labor, embedded office, security, utilities, and in-kind contribution as well as cash contributions for counterpart transportation costs.

In prior program years, GSP/Taqadum paid for the remaining items when it hosted workshops, conferences, training-related events, and some meetings. These costs include facility rental, training materials, meals, accommodation, and some participant transportation expenses. The ratio of counterpart to GSP/Taqadum cost, specifically as it relates to cash Activity Cost Sharing, was inequitable. The program paid a disproportionately large share of these costs. During the extension period, this situation will be reversed.

Lessons Learned: GSP/Taqadum will reverse the cash-based cost sharing inequity described above through an Implementation Letter Agreements (ILAs) between the project and the target provinces. ILA's will require provinces to absorb training cost for participants, including travel, meals, and accommodation costs for national and regional events. For province-level events, a province will provide the necessary funds to cover all participant related expenses. Additionally, the target provinces will continue to provide office space and ancillary in-kind services for embedded GSP/Taqadum staff.

5. Monitoring & Evaluation

Ideally, a program's indicators in its Performance Management Plan (PMP) must be tightly coupled to the requirements of the technical work plan and by extrapolation, to the Results Framework. In Program Year 3, GSP/Taqadum's activities were resized and to the program's credit, the technical tasks and outcomes were very clearly articulated. Correspondingly, the PMP was modified to (a) include new indicators that were responsive to the work plan, and (b) drop indicators that were no longer relevant.

On another level, the new indicators in Program Year 3 reflected the maturity of GSP/Taqadum, consistent with the age of the program and demands from USAID to show the impact of its investment. With the exception of one indicator, the remaining new indicators were outcome indicators that possessed depth and challenged the program staff to achieve its thresholds.

During the course of Program Year 3, progress in attaining these thresholds to be counted as meeting a given indicator target was continually shared with the technical leadership and staff.

Accordingly, the PMP served to focus the program on achieving outcomes and based on the documented evidence, the result is that GSP/Taqadum was successful in its efforts.

Lessons Learned: The indicators in the extension period PMP is exclusive to the objectives laid out for activities during the six-month duration derived from the modified Results Framework. Similar to the indicators introduced in Program Year 3, the extension period PMP is very firmly connected to the work plan and will serve as one of three tools employed by management to track activity progress and measure contractual outcomes.